

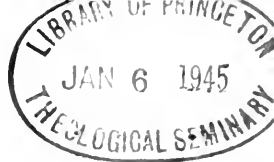
The Psychology of Prayer

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The Psychology
of
Prayer.

A Study in the Philosophy
of
Religious-Experience.

By

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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PRAYER

Perhaps the most remarkable thing in human experience, and at the same time the most common, is the fact that men pray—not only *some* men, but *all* men. In some form or other, under certain circumstances all men pray—Jews, Mohammedans, Buddhists, Christians, Pagans, Atheists, Infidels, Agnostics, Heathens, *all* alike pray. Prayer is not a matter of accident, or temperament, or sentiment, or habit; it is absolutely universal, co-extensive with the race of mankind. As far back as we have any knowledge men have had re-

ligion, and in every form of religion prayer is one of the most conspicuous facts. Some of the oldest prayers which have come down to us from the old Aryan world have been preserved and may be studied. As far back as ancient history goes men have worshipped the sun-god, and the worshipper has offered prayers for light and guidance. Even among savages prayer is found. Some of these prayers of barbarians have been written down, so that we may examine and study them. Tylor in his "Anthropology" mentions the following: "Among the Zulus, the sacrificer says, 'There is your bullock, ye spirits of our people. I pray for a healthy body that I may live comfortably and do thou treat me with mercy.' " Another is a prayer of the Khouds, when offering a human sacrifice to the earth-goddess. The sacrificer says, "By our cattle, our flocks, our pigs, and our grain we procured a victim and

offered a sacrifice. Do you now enrich us. Let our herds be so numerous that they cannot be housed; let children so abound that the care of them shall be too much for the parents; let our heads ever strike against brass pots innumerable hanging from our roofs; let all the kites in the country be seen in the trees of our village, from beasts being killed there every day. We are ignorant of what it is good to ask for. You know what is good for us. Give it to us." These specimens of barbaric prayer are illuminating and interesting for study, because they show the conception these savages have of the connection between sacrifices and prayer, and because they reveal a certain mental attitude on the part of the worshipper.

In the higher forms of religion these gross sacrificial rites assume a more spiritual character, and the act passes into the giving up of some-

thing which is dear to the worshipper, and is a sign of the adoration acceptable to the god whom he worships. This is a significant step in the evolution of the prayer idea as an expression of the worshipper's mental or spiritual attitude, and has great value in the explanation of the psychology of prayer. We may ask, why should a human being, however ignorant he may be, prostrate himself before a stake in the ground, or a pile of stones, or an image carved out of wood, and even talk to these objects, and ask a blessing of them? When the African or the South Sea Islander assures us that he believes this stock or pile of stones or carved image is for the time being an embodiment of a divine spirit, we see a new meaning of his act and realize that it is worthy of serious study.

Wherever there is human life, there is religion, and wherever there

is religion there is prayer. As a writer has said, "Everywhere, whether among the dark Papuan, or the yellow Malay, or the brown Polynesian, or the red North American Indian, or the white Caucasian races of mankind, even among the lowest of the low in the scale of humanity, there are, if we will but listen, whisperings about divine beings, imaginings of a future life; there are prayers and sacrifices which, even in their most degraded and degrading form, still bear witness to that old and ineradicable faith that everywhere there is a God to hear our prayers, if we will but call on Him, and to accept our offerings, if they are offered as a ransom for sin or as a token of a grateful heart."

But when we ask, *Why* do men pray? the answer is not immediately apparent. That, in fact, is an exceedingly difficult question to an-

swer. It is one of the deepest problems we can ever undertake to solve. And yet we feel assured that a fact so universal, so fundamental in human experience as prayer must have some rational ground of explanation in the nature of the human soul. Such a question cannot be decided by matters of historical statement, or by mere authority; it requires the most searching analysis and the best light of science and philosophy. In the investigation of a subject like this we gladly welcome every item of information or suggestion that can come from any possible source. Can the science of psychology throw any light upon the phenomena of prayer? Is there such a thing, among the realities of scientific knowledge, as a psychology of prayer? After examining our subject in the best light we have, we must say that prayer, in its deepest ground, is a psychological problem, and can be explained, as far as any

explanation is possible, on psychological principles.

There are so many different aspects of prayer and so many different elements entering into it, that we cannot hope to arrive at any satisfactory results without resorting to methods of analysis and induction. The scientific method of dealing with the subject of prayer is to begin with the common facts of observation and experience, and work along the line of these facts as far as they will lead us. And when we arrive, in this way, at a point where empirical facts can no longer guide us, we must resort to the processes of rational thought in following the subject into the domain of the unseen and the unknown. Whether we regard prayer as a specific state of consciousness, as a form of focalized attention, as an emotion, as a mode of the will, as a native instinct, as a

particular activity of the spiritual ego, as the soul's orientation to its divine origin and destiny, as an unconscious recognition of human weakness and dependence, or as an auricular expression of the soul's sub-conscious life—in whatever way we choose to regard it, prayer is primarily a psychological fact that we have to deal with.

In the very start we may ask, What is prayer? The Bible gives many examples of prayer, but nowhere do we find any theoretical explanation of the mystery which attaches to prayer, nor does it give any definition of what prayer is or consists in. As the Bible nowhere gives any argument for the existence of God but simply assumes such existence as the foundation of everything else, so it gives no definition, no argument in regard to prayer but assumes it as a universal fact of human experience. The

Master taught His disciples His own beautiful prayer without telling them what prayer is, neither was it necessary that He should. In the writings of the theologians and the moralists, of poets and wise men there is found a bewildering number of definitions and statements about prayer, but none of them can be accepted as scientifically accurate or exhaustive. Many of them are simply rhetorical forms of expression, and have little value as material for study. For example, we hear it said that prayer is the finite communicating with the Infinite; or prayer is the cry of the soul to its unseen Creator; or Baily's familiar expression, "Prayer is the spirit speaking truth to Truth;" or Henry Vaughan's saying, "Prayer is the world in tune," and so on indefinitely. These utterances may all be true, but as definitions they have no value, they do not define.

We may gather some information concerning the nature of prayer from a variety of phrases and words used in the Bible. Prayer is called an 'asking' (John 15:16); a 'seeking' and 'knocking' (Matt. 7:7); a 'lifting up of the soul,' and a 'pouring out of the heart' (Psa. 25:1:62:8); a 'looking up to' and a 'talking with God' (Job. 15:4; Psa. 5:3); a 'wrestling with God' (Rom. 15:30); a 'taking hold of God' (Isa. 64:7); 'meditation' (Psa. 5:1); 'inquiring' (Gen. 25:22); 'crying unto God' (Sam. 7:8); 'sighing,' 'mourning,' 'groaning,' 'weeping' (Psa. 6:6; 12:5; 55:2; Joel 2:17); 'breathing' (Lam. 3:56); 'supplication,' 'entreaty' (Ex. 8:8; Zech. 12:10), etc. All these expressions are rich as material for psychological study, and show that prayer is an attitude of soul.

The analysis of an act of prayer

reveals the following elements, which may be divided into primary and secondary. The primary are those which are found in all prayers, while the secondary are present in some and not in others. Among the primary elements we may name, (1) a feeling of need; (2) a sense of dependence on a higher power; (3) faith in the existence and goodness of God; (4) a desire for some particular blessing; (5) hope or expectation of receiving good; (6) an attitude of supplication. The secondary elements include such as, (1) a sense of sinfulness; (2) idea of the divine wrath; (3) feeling of reverence; (4) obedience to the will of God—"Thy will be done;" (5) contrition of heart; (6) confession of sins, etc. The last group of elements is found in all Christian prayer, but not in the prayers of the heathen man, hence the distinction we make in the two groups. This analysis is not claimed to be exhaus-

tive or final, but it will serve to bring to our notice certain states of consciousness which are fundamental in prayer. There is doubtless a psychological sequence in these states, though we cannot always determine this with accuracy, neither is there an unalterable sequence in all cases. but it varies with changing conditions. The feeling of need, it seems, lies very deep in the consciousness of the one who truly prays, and perhaps to it we may ascribe the primacy. By *need* we mean here not simply or chiefly the sense of privation of some material thing such as food or raiment or bodily health, but more particularly the sense of the soul's personal relation to the Author of all good. Our deepest need is to be in a right relation to God. The hymn "I need Thee every hour" expresses the idea we wish to convey, and the stress is on 'Thee.' The soul's deepest need is God. Out of this feeling of need grows the sense

of dependence on a higher being. This feeling has something of absoluteness connected with it. However much a mortal being may magnify his independence and his self-sufficiency, in his inmost soul he knows that he is absolutely dependent on God not only for his existence, his life, but also for everything that can make life agreeable and successful. In the case of the heathen man this feeling of dependence is no less distinct and absolute than in the enlightened Christian. He who prays, believes that there is a God who can hear and answer prayer, or else he would not pray. He believes, moreover, that God, though unseen, is interested in his welfare and is good to give him such things as he needs and desires. The agnostic's doctrine certainly is in opposition to the deepest instincts of the human soul. In the specimen prayer of the Khoud, quoted above, he says to his god, "We are ignorant

of what is good to ask for. You know what is good for us. Give it to us." This implies that he believes in a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God and that this God is good and will give him such things as are good for him. The heathen man believes that there are spirits who hear his prayers. Herbert Spencer's explanation that the heathen man acquires this belief from fear of a dead ancestor, does not go deep enough. Belief in a prayer-hearing God or divine spirit is one of the soul's instincts and cannot be accounted for on any theory of custom. As a distinct state of consciousness, we can analyze out of every prayer the element of *desire* for some particular thing which we believe to be good for us. Desire is an antecedent state of mind which lies back of all petitions, and conditions both the will and the form of utterance in the prayer we offer; if we desired nothing we would not

pray. There is also implied the hope and the expectation of receiving what we ask for. Hope and expectation are inseparably connected with prayer. The sixth and last primary element is an attitude of supplication, literally a bowing, or a bending of the knee before God.

Prayer is not primarily a petition; in its deepest nature it is something much more than petition. There is an attitude of soul which lies far back of petition. The essential thing in prayer is a certain attitude of the soul in which it realizes its relation to the Divine Spirit. Mrs. Browning once said that in the deepest agony the soul's only prayer is "O God!" because we want God Himself rather than anything He can do for us or give us. The principle involved in this utterance some one has illustrated thus: If a child is far away from home and has fallen ill or is otherwise in distress, his deep-

est longing is for mother herself rather than anything she might do for him—just her simple presence will satisfy the child's longing and in that every other blessing is comprehended. So if we eliminate every secondary and accidental consideration, and view prayer in its essential nature, we may say that it is the soul's longing for a consciousness of the Divine Presence. The deepest of all prayers is "Thy will be done!" and the really essential thing in that prayer is a particular attitude of soul. That is what the Savior prayed in Gethsemane. All other things fade from His consciousness. "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt"—"not my will, but thine be done!" Here, as one has observed, is no objective petition for any temporal good; all is subjective, all has to do with His attitude of soul. When His consciousness of His relation to the

Father was in any way disturbed or beclouded, it caused Him unspeakable agony. It was this that wrung from His heart those awful words on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" In prayer the soul seeks to relate its consciousness to the eternal consciousness. Human aspiration can go no farther. As Carlyle has said, "Prayer is the aspiration of our poor, struggling, heavy-laden soul towards its eternal Father."

The human spirit has a vague, yet unerring consciousness of its kinship with the Divine Spirit. In its various experiences it realizes the biblical truth that God made man in His own image and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Because of this kinship the soul's longing for communion with the Divine is quite natural to it. "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My

soul thirsteth for God, for the living God." This inspired utterance of the psalmist is the best possible answer that can be given to the question why man prays. The mystery of prayer finds its best explanation in the psychology of the sub-conscious self. If we could read clearly what goes on in the great deep of the sub-conscious soul we should understand why the human soul pants after the living God and why prayer is the truest expression of the soul's innermost experience. Our true personal life is vastly wider, deeper, larger than we know; our conscious life is only a very small part of our true life which, in Bible phrase, is eternal life. The luminous peak of our consciousness rises out of a deeper sub-realm of life, which, though below the threshold, plays a momentous part in our experience. There are mental phenomena beyond our conscious horizon as within this horizon, and we may say that with-

out the *beyond* we should not have the *within*. There are blank regions of consciousness just as there are blank spaces in sense experience of which none of the senses can give us any information. Of these blank regions of consciousness we have faint intimations, but not clear knowledge; at best they appear only in the *fringe* of consciousness. No man in mortal body has ever seen to the bottom of his psychic being nor explored its mystic contents. As we cannot see to the depths of the great ocean, so we cannot see clearly the wonderful things contained in the abysmal depths of our spiritual being. At some moments most favorable for introspection, when the surface is unruffled and the powers of thought are at their best, we may peer into the shadowy depths, but we are not able clearly to distinguish the wonders that lie below the surface; we can see mirrored only faint images of our Divine prototype.

Truly we know not what manner of beings we are, and from this we can understand what St. John meant when he said "It doth not yet appear what we shall be."

How does God come into the conscious soul, and how does the soul commune with God in prayer? The answer is, by way of the sub-conscious, where the human touches upon the Divine and goes out into the Divine. Through the sub-conscious soul the Infinite finds an inlet into the finite, and the finite relates itself to the Infinite as an estuary or tidal river relates itself to the great ocean beyond. What does the Apostle mean when, in his great speech at the Areopagus, he says, "Though he be not far from every one of us; for in him we live and move and have our being"? This is the utterance of a mystic philosopher who, in a rare moment of inspi-

ration and insight, has caught a glimpse of the mystery of incarnate being and of the relation of finite souls to their infinite First Cause. It does not seem probable that this wonderful language is meant to be merely metaphorical; it is no figure of speech, no mere comparison, no allegorical picture of the intimate relation of the believing soul to its glorious Creator. We must take his language to be a strictly literal statement of fact, setting forth a sublime truth of psychology far deeper than the average thinker suspects. What the Apostle here intimates is, that in the great deep of our incarnate being we touch bottom on the Infinite and discover our essential oneness with the Deity. Downward through our sub-conscious being we go out, as it were, into the Abyss of infinite and eternal being in so realistic a way that we may be said to "live and move and have our being in Him."

In the last analysis of personality we discover the fact that God and man are inherently bound up together in a mystic union which no finite mind can fully comprehend. Perhaps this is the thought that Wordsworth had in mind when he wrote:

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;
The Soul that rises with us, our life's star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God who is our home."

There is a hidden glory in man which is the image of his glorious Creator, and this in moments of ecstasy may shine forth in a kind of transfiguration like that of our Lord. If we probe deep enough into self we come upon the Divine in every personality. By some deeper principle of perception than that which gives us our sense-world we discover that our lives are hidden in God and

that "in Him we live and move and have our being." Our souls are but inlets which open on the infinite sea whose shoreless tides we feel beating in upon us. In each one of us there is a vast range of latent faculty whose possibilities we but poorly realize. If we could draw upon these hidden resources we might do wonders. Our higher soul-powers are already in touch with the spiritual world. In the submerged life of the soul is found the explanation of the mystery of prayer. Prayer is the normal life of the sub-conscious soul; it is the normal mode by which the mighty sub-conscious activities express themselves in our conscious life.

The foregoing remarks have led up to the idea which is central in this discussion, namely, that prayer is a particular attitude of soul. It does not consist in any form of words:

there may be prayer without spoken words and, on the other hand, not all spoken words are true prayer. This is illustrated in the prayer of the Pharisee who “stood and prayed thus with himself—God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican”, etc. The publican, on the other hand, “standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me a sinner.”—Note his mental attitude.—I tell you this man went down to his home justified rather than the other.” Why was not the Pharisee justified? Why was not his prayer heard? It was a form of words and not true prayer. His mental attitude was not right. He could not be blessed in his act, because his mental attitude was not such as could make an answer to his prayer possible. Prayer denotes an asking attitude. “Ask and ye shall receive”.

Asking implies an open, receptive state of mind, a state in which the ego puts itself in such relation to God that it reaches out its hand, so to speak, to the Giver of all good, earnestly desiring, expecting, imploring the benefits craved, an attitude of spiritual communion with the source of all good, the finite face to face with the Infinite.

We get further light on our subject by considering *when* men pray. Most men pray only when they are in distress of body, mind, or estate; when things go against them, when the sky is dark, when the soul is sorely tried, when perplexity and doubt, adversity and tribulations, calamities and afflictions, sickness, misfortune, bereavement and death, come upon them, then the soul turns to God in prayer. In times of prosperity, when all things go well with us, when the sun shines, when nature and providence smile upon us and

we are happy, then we forget to pray; having all things, there is nothing to ask for. All this means that prayer arises from a particular mental attitude, in which the soul's thoughts and emotions and volitions, its powers and its susceptibilities, are concentrated upon one object which occupies the focus of consciousness.

This idea is further supported by the fact that our Savior not only taught his disciples to pray, but He himself prayed. Why did He pray? Was He, who had all things at his command, in need of anything? We cannot think that His prayers were ordinary petitions for some material blessing in the human sense of petitions. We are told that He often retired to the mountain solitudes for communion with His Heavenly Father. If we examine particular ones of His prayers, such, for example, as the sacerdotal prayer recorded by St. John, or His prayer in Gethsemane, or His prayer on the

cross, we conclude that they were not prayers prompted by need in the human sense. They were prayers of mental attitude; they denote how He felt His spiritual relation to His Father; they show in outward form the inner experience of His soul. In His agony in the garden the burden of His thought was "Not my will, but Thine be done—" the attitude of His will to the Father's will. In the high priestly prayer, "That they may be one, even as we are one"—the attitude of spiritual harmony and unity. On the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—In all of these we cannot fail to see reflected His inward state of mind. Everywhere the idea uppermost in His prayers was that He might be in the right attitude toward His Heavenly Father. So likewise the deepest thing in human prayer is the longing of the soul for an attitude of harmony with the Divine will, that it may be one with

Him and in tune with spiritual things. The soul realizes that communion with God is essential for development of spiritual life; hence where such a yearning exists, there prayer is the normal mode of soul-life. The soul prays that the sense of its relation to God and the spiritual world may be kept alive. Men pray because they cannot help praying, and they will continue to pray as long as their psychic nature remains the same as it is now. In prayer men seek instinctively to realize their ideal spiritual selfhood, a self that in some degree shall be worthy of the Absolute Being whose image they bear.

Prayer being essentially a mental attitude, how can we account for the language of prayer, the particular postures of the body, and the various muscular movements connected with prayer? Prayer as a form of speech falls into the list of muscular reac-

tions. In its simplest form the process may be thought of in terms of nervous energy overflowing into various motor centers and thus producing the muscular movements implied in speech and other movements of the body. It is a well known fact of psychology that every idea and emotion, however remote and obscure it may be, tends to express itself in some form of movement, even though we are not conscious of such movement. This motor character of ideas renders our muscular system a faithful mirror of our secret thoughts. There is employed in the psychological laboratory a delicate piece of apparatus which makes visible and measures these slight movements with wonderful accuracy. It consists of a recording device which is fastened to the top of a person's head, so that his slightest movements will be recorded. Then we ask him, while standing perfectly still, to think of some object at his right side.

After several moments the recording instrument shows that he involuntarily leans in the direction of the object about which he is thinking. The same principle is illustrated in the fact that when people read they unconsciously accompany the reading with movements of the muscles of the throat, the tongue and the lips. Every subjective mental state seeks its appropriate mode of expression in some muscular movement. So the particular thought or emotion which occupies the mind at any moment in an act of prayer or devotion tends to set certain muscles into action. These resulting muscular reactions account for the form of speech, or the posture of the body such as kneeling, standing, prostration, etc., or particular gestures with the hands, or the facial expression, which accompany prayer. From the psychological viewpoint prayer is thus a mode of expression in which an outgoing nerve current from an inward idea-

tional center pours itself into motor activity of some sort or other. In the case of the Pharisee's prayer, his haughty bearing, his boastful words, his scornful glance at the poor publican were only the outward expression of his mental attitude, and this explains why he did not go down to his home justified.

We come now to the most difficult part of our subject, namely,

The Efficacy of Prayer

Several questions are here involved. Are prayers really answered? How are they answered? Does it do any good to pray? How is it possible for God who is immutable in nature to answer prayer? Is the answering of prayer congruous with the established order of nature? As a reply to the first of these questions we have the testimony of experience.

As Tennyson says:

“More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of.”

The argument of experience is unanswerable. There are tens of thousands of men who will testify without qualification that their prayers have been answered. This faith is so deeply rooted in the human heart that it would be impossible to eradicate it. Then, too, since prayer is and remains always a native and the deepest impulse of the human soul, absolutely universal, it seems altogether unreasonable to suppose that this impulse is nothing but a delusion. Yet the agnostic voluntarily commits himself to the doctrine that there is no reality in prayer, and that even if God could hear the prayers of His people and would wish to answer them, it is not possible for Him to do so. We may ignore the cold and fatalistic philosophy of agnosticism as contradic-

tory to human experience, and turn our attention to the constructive side of our subject.

How is the hearing and answering of prayer to be reconciled with the changeless nature of God? St. James tells us that "Every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." If the nature of the Divine Being is thus unchangeable, "without variableness or shadow of turning", and if His purposes move on eternally to their accomplishment like the heavenly bodies in their orbits, like the universal order of nature, how can these purposes be modified, or the events of history and the course of human life be affected in the least degree by prayer? The sceptic argues that to answer prayer would necessarily imply inconsistency or fickleness in God who has already established the

course of nature: that the course of nature being fixed and uniform, no means are open for answering supplications of any sort. In dealing with this objection we must consider it from the standpoint of theism, because on the pantheistic or atheistic or materialistic or agnostic assumption there is no room whatsoever for any discussion of the possibility of answering prayer. Theism assumes that God is a Person, capable of entering into communion with men, of hearing and answering their prayers, that He is mercifully disposed towards His creatures, that He is immediately concerned in them, and is actively engaged in making provision for their needs.

The difficulties that disturb the Christian believer are largely of his own making; they come from misconception of the character of God and of the order of the world. The prevailing idea of prayer has been,

in a large degree, derived from human analogies which are often misleading. To represent God as moved by prayer does not necessarily imply that He is mutable in character; we infer such mutability on a false analogy. It does not follow, because there is an appointed order of things, that there is no place left for the hearing and answering of prayer. There are channels open between God and the human soul through which the Divine power may operate to bring about changes in the physical order without impairing or in any way interfering with that order. We know that mind can communicate with mind, that spirit can influence spirit, that agencies can operate to change an individual's will so as to modify his whole course of life without in the least interfering with the integrity and freedom of his personality. There is no better established truth in psychology than this. And so, assuming that God is a Person

with the same kind of psychic nature as that of man, the Divine Spirit can communicate with the human spirit, can influence the human mind and will, can impart light, guidance, courage, faith, hope, love, strength to resist temptation, comfort in distress, and in any other way minister to human necessities by operating through the ordinary laws of mind. This does not involve any contradiction of the Divine attributes.

The Christian believer, no less than the confirmed scientist, posits the existence of laws of nature and a natural order of things in the world. He believes that order is Heaven's first law; his world is a world of order, a cosmos and not a chaos; he holds that all the operations of nature, the events of history, the whole course of human life, proceed under the reign of law. Now, are such laws to be considered a barrier in the way of answering prayer?

We believe that the efficacy of prayer is grounded in conformity to the laws of nature and the universal order of things. Browning is right when he says, "All is love, yet all is law." This is a very great utterance that states a profound truth with wonderful accuracy and conciseness. In the kingdom of grace, as in the kingdom of nature, not anarchy but law reigns. Prayer is answered according to law; like the working of miracles, the answering of prayer proceeds under the law of cause and effect, even though we are not able in all cases to trace clearly the mode of operating. If God can work miracles under the reign of law, so also can He answer prayer without violating or suspending the established laws of the universe. A miracle is not a causeless effect; there are no effects or phenomena in the world without causes. A causeless effect is unthinkable. When any kind of effect either in the physical

or spiritual world is produced, it means that such an effect comes from a definite cause. It is a serious error to conceive of a miracle as an effect without a cause, or as a violation or suspension of the laws of nature. We may assume that when our Savior worked miracles He did not set aside or suspend or in any way whatsoever interfere with the existing laws of causation. To Him who knew perfectly the hidden forces and principles and elements contained in the innermost constitution of nature, the wonderful works He performed were not miracles as we conceive of them; they are miraculous only to finite men who do not know the innermost nature of things. Miracles are such only to finite minds. To the Master the turning of water into wine, the stilling of the tempest, the healing of the sick, the opening of the blind eyes and deaf ears, the raising of the dead were not miracles in the sense

that they were causeless effects; they were natural effects in the hands of Him who knew the innermost constitution of things and who could guide the powers of nature according to His will. So if we could understand perfectly everything that is contained in the order of nature all difficulties in the way of answering prayer would vanish, and we would plainly see that though 'all is love,' yet 'all is law.'

What is a natural law? We must have right conceptions of the terms we employ in our discussion. Law is not a being, nor a force, nor an efficiency in the right sense of the word; law is a particular mode in which an efficiency operates. The efficiency is one thing, the law of its operation is something else. Behind the law is an efficiency, a power that can work, an agent that can guide and control and uphold the forces of nature.

Material law is a term that is used to express the uniformity of the sequences of nature. Law signifies God's plan and method of acting and bringing about His ends in the creation and government of the world. The act of God in answering prayer need not produce any variation in the ordinary sequence of phenomena so far as these are cognizable by man. The modification of efficient causes in operation may take the place of all proximate forces and in a way which we cannot perceive. There are mysteries in the world of science as well as in religion. The scientist who has his eye closely fixed upon law frequently finds that the mode of operation escapes his ken, yet he knows that behind all phenomena the reign of law is unbroken. That is, there are mysteries in regions which his eye cannot penetrate, but this does not disturb his faith in law.

What is meant by the uniformity of nature? This is another scientific expression which gives frequent cause of stumbling to Christian faith. But why should it? Because it is not understood. The uniformity of nature cannot mean that present phenomena have always existed or will always exist as we now see them. The sun has not always, that is, from eternity, risen in the east and set in the west, nor will it continue forever so to rise or set. There was a time when there was no sun, and the time is coming when there will be no sun. The theory that the natural world as it now exists and as we know it, has existed from all eternity is not scientific, and, as a matter of fact, is not held by the greatest scientists who know their subject. Science demands beginnings and likewise endings. Science, as well as the Bible, has its Genesis and Book of Revelation. On this the teachings of science and of the Bible are entirely in accord. The

history of nature is a record of continuous changes. At certain critical or epochal moments new forces have been introduced into the evolving world; from time to time new beings, new genera and species of animals and plants, new phenomena, new groups of phenomena have appeared on the scene. Nature is not uniform in the sense that it is a closed circuit so that nothing which was not eternally in the circuit, can come in. Professor Tyndall has conclusively shown that life, for example, could not always have existed on the earth in the evolving cosmic mass, but must have been introduced from without at a time later than the period when the igneous rocks were formed; and also that life at any time is not spontaneously generated, but can come only from previous life. The latest biology still holds the old doctrine of *omne vivum ex ovo*. Nature is uniform in the sense that the same laws work in the same way and that the

same causes tend to produce the same effects, but these laws and causes may be modified by superior power. The laws of nature may be modified in their action and in the effect they produce even by human agency. When I lay hold of a stone lying here on the earth and by muscular power lift it up and hold it in the air I modify the action of the law of gravity. I do not destroy or suspend or in any way violate that law; I only modify its customary effect by the higher power of my will. I modify a law of nature every time I lift my arm or foot. The laws of nature are modified whenever a man pumps water out of a well or constructs a dam to change the course of a stream or guides an aeroplane through the air. Electricity, by a law of nature, destroys life and property, but by superior intelligence it is made to minister to the comfort and necessities of mankind. In ten thousand ways man's intelligence and in-

ventive ingenuity is a modifying agency in the natural world. Mr. Burbank and the cattle breeder exert an almost creative power in bringing about new forms of vegetable and animal life, not by counteracting the laws of nature, but by using and directing them by their superior intelligence and power. If nature is thus plastic in the hands of the creature, how much more so in the hands of the Creator! If man can modify the action of nature's laws in working out his designs, cannot God also do so? "What we call the course of nature is nothing else than the will of God acting systematically, either as the sole efficient, or through the intermediary agency of a secondary cause."

It remains now to apply the principles we have found and illustrated to the matter of answering prayer. We must classify prayer with miracles; what is true of the one is

equally true of the other. As already stated, we believe that there are laws of nature, that God employs these in the government of the world, and that this is His customary way of dealing with men. But God is not a slave to His laws; He is their author and He controls them at His will. We think of God as an intelligent, free, self-directing personality, and therefore not fettered by the laws which He has instituted and which He uses as His agents working His sovereign will. It would be quite illogical to infer that, since there is an established order of nature, no such phenomena as miracles or answering of prayer could have occurred or ever would occur in the future. A miracle, as J. Stuart Mill has remarked, supposes the introduction of a new antecedent, namely, the volition of God, and the presence or absence of the antecedent is shown by the effect produced. Just so; but this new antecedent in the form of

God's volition may at any moment and at any point come in, and certainly has come in at innumerable points in the history of the world, and therefore nature is not a closed circuit. Without positing this 'new antecedent of God's volition', it is impossible to write the history of civilization or to preserve order in the cosmos. No one can get far in the interpretation of events or in the construction of a systematic body of truth without bringing into the account the volition of God. Nature is not unalterably uniform in the sense that miraculous effects, as we understand them, have never occurred, nor ever can occur, if God so wills. Anything can happen if God wills it, but we are assured that a rational God wills only that which is reasonable. Precisely so in the matter of answering prayer. He can answer prayer, if He wills it, by working with and modifying the customary action of His laws; but He answers only such

prayers as are reasonable. God is not bound by the inflexible chains of fate; He is over all, the Absolute First Cause, and so is free to work in the system of things as He may will. If He “makes the rain to fall”, He can send it or withhold it as He deems best. There is, therefore, nothing impossible or inconsistent with any law of nature or any principle of the divine economy for God to answer Elijah’s prayer that rain be withheld from falling on the land of Ahab for the space of six months, and again to send an abundance of rain when the prophet prayed that rain might come. The fall of rain is governed by the laws of meteorology, but God ordained and constantly upholds these laws by His will. He can assemble the clouds and make them pour out bounteous showers of rain to refresh the earth and minister to the wants of man and beast without violating or suspending His laws or

in any way acting in conflict with the order of nature.

There are numerous theories as to how prayer for physical changes may be answered. We can mention only a few. Schleiermacher thinks that prayer answers itself by operating as a cause among other causes, producing its own fulfilment. Similar to this is the view of Dr. Chalmers. He supposes that prayer and its answer may be connected as cause and effect, that these may form a sequence of a very subtle kind, more subtle than any of the sequences of the most latent physical substances; that God may interpose among the physical agents beyond the limit to which human sagacity can trace the operation of law. In all human affairs we know it is a fact that we can trace the actual agency of law but a very little way back. All this may be so, but it is too intangible, too obscure, to make a good working hy-

pothesis; it is not adequate for the ends of a science of psychology. If we may apply the principles of psychology to explain the phenomena of prayer we must build our theory on the facts of consciousness and not on metaphysical subtleties.

Dr. McCosh, in his "Divine Government", tells us that it is not necessary to suppose that prayer and its answer form a separate law of nature, for the answer may come as the result of other laws arranged for that very purpose. Nor is it necessary that God interpose to change His own laws. He has arranged these laws so that by their agency He may answer prayer without at all interfering with them. This is good so far. Then he goes on to say that God answers prayer in the same way that He compasses all His other moral designs. He does not require to interfere with His own arrangements, for there is an answer pro-

vided in the arrangement made by Him from all eternity. He answers prayer by a preordained appointment when He settled the constitution of the world and set all the parts in order. The answer to prayer proceeds on the foreseen circumstance that the prayer will be offered. The connection between prayer and its answer is not one in the mechanical laws of nature, but in the counsels of God; and the man who has prayed, as he looks for the answer, feels that he must fall in with the Divine procedure. Dr. McCosh assumes a prearranged harmony between the prayer and its answer; both had their place in the plan of the world. The train of causes is set at the beginning, in the foreknowledge of the petition to be offered, for the evolving of an appropriate response. No interposition is required; the reign of law is undisturbed.

This theory may be plausible and satisfactory to one whose mind is pre-

occupied with ideas of foreordination and predestination, but to the present writer it does not seem good psychology, because it sets aside the free will of God at every moment and in every new emergency that may arise in the ongoing of the affairs of the world, and also because it does not recognize the free action of the petitioner's will. On this supposition the mind of the petitioner is simply receptive, entirely passive and not cooperatively participating. This is similar to that theory of prophetic inspiration which posits that the medium of revelation, the prophet or apostle, is entirely passive; he is simply the pen of the inspiring Spirit, but his mind or will does not in any sense participate in the message; the prophet or apostle is only the flute on which the Divine Spirit plays, but he takes no part in the music; the personality of the medium does not figure in giving the words of inspiration. But this is certainly false. If this pre-

arrangement theory is true then the petitioner has no active part in his petition; he is only a passive looker-on while the Divine plan is in process of fulfilment; there is nothing else for him to do but simply wait for the fulness of time when his petition will be automatically answered. And this is contrary to the known principles of psychic action. The mind of man, neither in prayer nor any other mode of activity, acts thus automatically. The will of him who prays aright is a powerful factor in the answering of his prayer. Prayer is the highest form of cooperative action which a human being can perform. In a very important way the petitioner must cooperate actively in the process of answering prayer and receiving the blessing. The blessing sought in prayer is not thrust upon us while we remain in a passive state; we receive the Divine blessing in a degree proportionate to the earnestness and faithfulness with which we

do our part. We ask and receive not, because we ask amiss. And this is one way in which we ask amiss, namely, when we pray for God's blessing and fail to do our part to make that blessing possible. If the answer to our prayers was arranged for from the beginning of the world, then plainly our mind or will has no real part in the process. Our Lord exhorts, "Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you". Such language implies an intensely active state of mind on the part of him who prays aright. "Whatsoever things ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." "If thou canst believe, nothing is impossible to him that believeth." The faith and the will implied in such utterances denote an active cooperating state of mind, in fact the most active we can conceive, and not simply a state of passive receptivity. The soul of him

who prays in earnest lifts itself into communion with God, reaches out its hand, so to speak, to lay hold of the arm that sways the universe.

The words of our Savior to the father of the lunatic boy, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth", powerfully emphasize the dynamic aspect of the prayer of faith, which truly accomplishes wonders. And it is not necessary to suppose that the power is all supernaturally imparted just at the moment. Of course all power ultimately comes from the Divine Spirit, but the Holy Spirit may work mediately through the human spirit in the prayer of faith as He does in the act of inspiration. The Holy Spirit induces a state of mind on the part of the one who prays in which the latent resources of the soul are made available for service. No man, under ordinary circumstances, makes use of all the power God has given

him; there is always an unexplained and unexplored and unused remainder of resources. A great psychologist has said that in the service of our daily life, if we worked up to the full measure of our ability we would all be geniuses. So if our faith-life were keyed up to the full extent of its possibilities, mighty works would be performed. This is what the Master meant when He said to His disciples, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do". How poorly we realize the possibilities of faith in a soul that is fully alive and draws upon the resources that are hidden within its capacity. This idea is suggested by the case of the lunatic boy who was brought to the disciples of Jesus to be healed, "and they could not". Why could they not? "Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could we not cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief;

for verily I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit, this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting". Their failure was not due to a lack of ability, but to the fact that they had not the state of mind and heart necessary for the occasion. The statement that if they had "faith as a grain of mustard seed" they could remove mountains, is to be taken in a literal sense. Not that by simply believing the mountain would remove, but if they had the right mental attitude, the right faith and will, they would put agencies and forces into operation that would certainly bring about the desired result. Faith implies a state of mind in which its powers are active and its resources are made use of. According to the words of the Master, the condition of a miracle-working faith is that of

“prayer and fasting”. The efficacy of “prayer and fasting” consists in a kind of spiritual discipline which sets free the latent powers of the soul and so makes possible the performance of a work which otherwise could not be performed. When the Savior here mentions ‘fasting’ as one of the conditions of power, He refers to a deep psychological truth. There is a close relation between ‘fasting’ and mental activity. It has been observed that prolonged abstinence from food frequently results in highly sharpened intellectual powers. Numerous examples of this are found in the literature of history and biography; many actors, speakers, and singers habitually fast before their public performances. Fasting has marked effects in the way of speeding up the mental and spiritual processes and of clearing and invigorating the mind. It is a significant fact that fasting has been practiced in all ages and in all the ancient religions, with

perhaps the single exception of that of Zoroaster. It appears to have been in use also among the semi-civilized and savage tribes in both hemispheres. Among the Israelites it was an established custom which they observed with great diligence. It was also practiced among the early Christians. The Reformers returned to the original conception of fasting as a means of self-discipline and a preparation for prayer. Our Lord Himself fasted. It cannot be that a practice so universal, commended by the greatest of men, and encouraged by Christ Himself, is a mere superstition. It is a principle in human nature which serves the important purpose of strengthening the mental powers and making the soul's resources available for service.

Prayer induces a dynamic state of mind in which the soul's powers are keyed up to the limit of their possibilities; it serves to convert the soul's

potential energy into actual miracle-working power. It acts like a burning glass to concentrate the energies of the soul to a focus; it brings about a psychic state in which the soul, like an electric conductor, becomes charged with dynamic energy which pours itself into the motor tract to be given out in the performance of works that would not be possible in the ordinary state. Prayer acts like a mental tonic to tone up and invigorate the soul into a state of forcefulness. It begets a holy confidence in which the soul lays hold on omnipotence and draws into itself divine strength. It has been said that if we cannot move God toward us by prayer, we do move ourselves toward God. By this means a channel is opened for the influx of divine power. When men enter into the fulness of the prayer-life they come into a condition of superior forcefulness in which not only the larger conception of life is realized, but the

soul discovers its kinship and unity with God. God answers our prayers by taking us into His confidence and by the influence of His Holy Spirit so working upon our spirits that we are made to cooperate with Him in securing the blessing asked for. When God created us in His own image, He conserved in our spiritual nature mighty powers and sublime possibilities which in prayer, through the Divine influence, are called forth into action for the performance of works that seem miraculous.



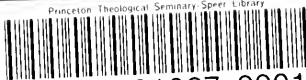


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